

Before I learned how to speak,
and before I learned how to walk,
I learned how to listen without hesitation.

I found music early.

No. Music found me.

Before fluency,

before literacy,

before confidence,

before the world asked me,

asked me to explain who I was.

To explain who my parents were,

for them, I had to explain.

It, music, lived in my home,

it lived in me.

Songs carried history,

songs carried me.

It had melodies that said

You belong.

Even when the world around me,

felt unsure, scary.

Between English and Spanish,

my own voice often stayed inside me.

Silence became my accent.

It was always what others wanted,

what others needed to hear.

It was their words, not mine.

But music,

it never mistook silence for absence.

It gave me a language,

that crossed borders,

after I, myself, did when I was only two.

Music saved me,

countless times.

It is part of the reason I am who I am.

The reason I am alive.

I am stronger, I'm not alone.

When no one saw me,

it saw me.

Childhood trauma.

Physical.

Emotional.

Those scars are still there.

They don't vanish, but

they diminish.

Though it doesn't diminish who I am,

my scars define me.
My scars tell a story,
My scars are a reminder
of a story of how strong I've become.

Thus, in May, while still in high school,
I enlisted.
The Army.
In June, I graduated.
In July, I turned eighteen.

More responsibility arrived,
with weight,
with expectation,
with no option to wait around.
Only hurry up and wait.

The seven Army values.
Loyalty, duty,
respect,
selfless service,
honor, integrity,
lastly, personal courage.

For nine years

in the Army National Guard,
I learned discipline
through repetitiveness,
resilience through utter fatigue,
and service through precision.

As a mechanic,
I learned how to listen completely.
To engines.

To warnings that sign.
To problems that of a faint whisper
before they became failures.

That kind of listening
became part of me.

It became the reason
that made me better.

Music followed me there.
Through long drives,
through long nights,
through moments when exhaustion
took over, making everything feel heavy.

No need for real sound,
just the memory of the lyrics.

It kept me going

Throughout the days and nights.
It reminded me
that I was more than a role,
more than a uniform.
Now, I am on the path to education.
I am to listen to students,
listen to their journey,
learn what music moves them.
I want to see what different cultures
bring to me, and to show me
what different music means to them.

Soon, I will choose to listen
on a global scale.
I am preparing to listen in Japan.

Study abroad is not just travel for me,
there is nothing simple about it.
It is a possibility for me to spend time
learning how to enter unfamiliar spaces
with care and humility.

I am drawn to this opportunity
because I know what it means
to learn without fluency,

to observe before speaking,
and to listen before assuming.
Assumptions have no place
in a culture that is not my own.

Abroad, I want to learn how education
lives inside another culture.
What music means to them,
how communities teach
through tradition.
How learning sounds in another language,
and how music carries identity
throughout generations and borders.

I want to listen deeply,
in classrooms shaped by different values,
to understand how students
are supported,
how students are cared for.
How belonging is created, and
how culture is honored instead of erased.

Classrooms where learning is intentional,
where students are taught to notice.
To persist. To overcome. To respect.

Both the group and the individual.
I want to understand how education
In Japanese culture connect.
How responsibility and identity intertwine

I am drawn to Japan because
it honors learning through observation.
Observation is my best way of learning.

I can learn through practice,
and through respect.

Listening is valued in Japan.

Silence carries meaning,
and learning is shaped
by care and community.

Music reminds me
that there is no such thing as perfection.

Therefore, connection
is not built through perfection,
but through presence.

That understanding begins
when we are willing
to be learners again.

We are always going to be students
in this world.

When I return home,
I will carry these lessons with me,
into classrooms,
into communities,
in the way I will help students
who feel new, unheard, or unseen.
Because I recognize that feeling,
I know how to help.

My life has always been movement,
between languages,
between service and study,
between where I have been
and where I am going.

What I have done
and what I will continue to be doing.

Music taught me how to listen.

Study abroad in Japan
will teach me how to listen
across more borders with intention.

First North American borders at two,
Now Asian borders at twenty-eight.
And that is the educational journey
I am ready to take.